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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0118  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0120  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 003482

SIPDIS

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PARIS FOR WALLER; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/16/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: TFLE01: SYRIA AS OF 1500 HOURS LOCAL, SUNDAY,  
JULY 16, 2006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: The situation in Syria remains relatively calm. DAO reports no signs of a higher state of alert, except for air defense units that were moved to a heightened level in late June. The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that President Asad spoke by phone with Lebanon,s President, promising Syrian resources for the wounded and those seeking safe haven and for the rebuilding of Lebanon,s infrastructure. It was Asad's first public comment on the conflict. We have heard several reports of a public protest for the morning of July 17 with the participation of a wide variety of government offices. The theme is unknown but will probably be pro-SARG and express solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian people. Syrian officials estimated up to 90,000 individuals have crossed from Syrian into Lebanon in the past few days. The Director of Protocol told the Charge that the FM himself had authorized the issuance of border visas to all Americans and that the SARG would authorize the entry three TDY consular officers from Embassy Cairo whose services may be needed in the event of a large influx of Amcits. Many AmCits reported crossing July 15 with no difficulty; they paid \$15-20 at the border for Syrian visas. Many Damascus hotels are full, and airlines are struggling to keep up with demand for flights out of the country. End Summary.

POLITICAL/MILITARY ISSUES

12. (C) The situation in Syria remains relatively calm. DAO reports no tangible evidence of a higher state of alert, except for air defense units that were moved to a heightened state of alert since late June. There were rumors, however, being picked up in the regional media, that Syria is calling up some of its reserves to join their units. Syrian officials were quoted July 16 denying reports that the IDF had bombed a border area in Syrian territory July 15. The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that President Bashar al-Asad spoke with Lebanese President Emile Lahoud by phone to express solidarity with the Lebanese people. He said he would put Syria,s resources at the disposal of Lebanon to assist with rescuing and treating the wounded and providing safehaven for those fleeing the conflict, and providing building materials to help Lebanon rebuild its destroyed infrastructure. It was Asad's first public comment on the conflict since it erupted. MP and head of the foreign affairs committee Noumeir al-Ghanem was quoted on al-Jazeera July 15 stating that Syria was prepared to respond proportionately to any Israeli aggression. He added that Syria did not want to see the conflict spread outside

Lebanon. AP and regional press quoted Israeli Transportation Minister and former Minister of Defense Shaul Mofaz July 16 as saying that a missile that struck Haifa railway station was a Syrian missile. We have heard several reports of a public protest for the morning of July 17 with the participation of a wide variety of government offices. The theme was so far unknown but will probably be pro-regime and express solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian people. Pro-Hizballah themes are also likely.

#### CONSULAR

13. (C) Syrian officials were quoted as estimating that some 90,000 individuals have crossed the border with Lebanon and been allowed into Syria in the past few days. ACS received reports late July 15 that an Amcit trying to cross the border into Syria was turned back by Syrian authorities. The Director of Protocol, the Embassy's designated MFA contact, told the Charge that the FM himself had authorized the issuance of border visas to all Americans. In response to Charge's complaint that SARG immigration authorities were only issuing visas with three days validity, an insufficient period in which to make arrangements to depart Syria under current conditions, the MFA undertook to see that the duration was lengthened. MFA also agreed to issue visas in Cairo for three TDY consular officers from Embassy Cairo whose services may be needed in the event of a large influx of Amcits.

14. (SBU) ACS continues to get a high volume of calls from people in Lebanon who would like to know whether they should leave Lebanon or wait for "the boat;" which land border to take; and whether or not they can get across the border. ACS is advising them to bring water, food, a full tank of gas, as

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much money in dollars as possible and a cell phone, if they decide to cross. ACS is informing Amcits that they should be allowed to enter Syria but does not advise them whether to do so. The consular section is asking Amcits to telephone ACS from the border if they have problems getting in and to call to confirm entry into Syria. Many AmCits reported crossing July 15 with no difficulty; they paid \$15-20 at the border for Syrian visas. Almost all families have a significant quantity of cash with them. Our repatriation limit has been raised to \$4000/person with a max of \$16,000 per family without prior authorization from State. To date, ACS has done no repats but has had one family who requested subsistence funds. Our last warden message was 07/13/2006.

15. (SBU) Almost all hotels and shelters in Damascus are reported to be full. Only two hotels had confirmed availability for last night. ACS got a number of Amcits into one of them. Consular section is checking again on availability July 16.

#### ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL

16. (SBU) British Air has switched its Beirut-London flight to Damascus, giving the airline an additional flight out of Damascus each day. Air France changed its 07/19 flight to a larger plane. Austrian Air July 15 switched to flying in a larger aircraft (the Airbus 321 as opposed to the 319) so as to have 60 additional seats to offer per flight, according to its local representative. Gulf Air is taking similar action. Almost no confirmed seats are available on any airline before 07/19, and already seats for that day are scarce. Most people are waitlisted or told by the airlines to try their luck at the airport.

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